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The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 10 August 2018 (S/PRST/2018/17), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to keep it informed about the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). It provides an assessment of the major political and security trends in Central Africa since the report of the Secretary-General dated 1 June 2018 (S/2018/521), and an update on progress in the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA. The report also provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin region, pursuant to Council resolution 2349 (2017).

II. Major developments in the Central Africa subregion

A. Political, peace and security developments and trends

2. The political situation in Central Africa was dominated by elections held in a number of countries in the subregion, including Cameroon, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe, and the ongoing preparations for upcoming elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo later in 2018. The security situation remained fragile in some parts of the subregion and social tensions continued to rise in some countries.

3. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) held a joint summit of Heads of State and Government on peace, security, stability and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in Lomé on 30 July. The Heads of State and Government adopted a joint communiqué and the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, in which they committed to strengthening cooperation on peace and security issues.

Political development and trends

4. On 2 July in Cameroon, at the request of its President, Paul Biya, the National Assembly extended the mandate of all Members of Parliament for one year, beginning 29 October 2018, thereby postponing scheduled legislative elections. Local elections

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were also postponed to 2019 by a presidential decree, citing challenges in organizing the presidential, legislative and local elections simultaneously. The presidential election took place on 7 October. The electoral management body noted that the turnout was particularly low in the North-West and South-West regions. According to the final results announced by the Constitutional Council on 22 October, the President was re-elected with 71.28 per cent of the vote. The voter turnout rate was 53.8 per cent.

5. The security situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon continued to deteriorate. Sporadic fighting between security forces and armed groups was reported throughout the reporting period. On 12 July, the convoy of the Minister for Defence was attacked on two separate occasions near Kumba in the South-West region. On the night of 28 to 29 July, an armed group attacked a prison in Ndop in the North-West region, resulting in the escape of 163 inmates. On 26 September, armed individuals also attacked a prison in Wum in the North-West region, leading to the escape of 80 inmates. On 5 November, nearly 80 students and staff from a secondary school in Bamenda, in the North-West region, were kidnapped. All of the students were released the following day. During the reporting period, there were reports of sexual violence perpetrated by both security forces and armed groups. In response, "gender desks" were established at police stations in the South-West region in an effort to establish a safe and confidential reporting process on sexual and gender-based violence and related crimes. On 11 October, religious leaders of the Catholic, Protestant and Muslim communities in the English-speaking regions held a meeting in preparation for an "Anglophone General Conference" scheduled to be held in Buea, in the South-West region, on 21 and 22 November, but which was later postponed. At the same meeting, they reiterated their appeal for the cessation of military and insurgent operations in the English-speaking regions.

6. At a press conference on 11 August, the President of Chad, Idriss Deby Itno, reported that his country needed 70 billion CFA francs (approximately $122 million) in order to organize the legislative elections scheduled for November. He also indicated that consultations were ongoing with the Government's technical and financial partners to seek the necessary assistance. The legislative elections were postponed, reportedly due to financial constraints.

7. On 15 June and 19 October, transhumance-related clashes were reported in the Ouaddaï region of Chad, leading to seven and five deaths, respectively. On 11 August, some 100 armed vehicles attacked two Chadian military garrisons at Kouri Bougoudi — a gold-mining area where many immigrants and Chadians are engaged in mining activities — in the Tibesti desert, near the border with Libya, resulting in the death of at least three Chadian soldiers and the theft of approximately 20 military vehicles. The Chadian armed group, Conseil de commandement militaire pour le salut de la République, claimed responsibility for the attack. In response, the Government requested all mine workers to leave the area prior to the initiation of air and ground operations by the armed forces. The Chadian Air Force bombarded two mining operations in the area of Kouri Bougoudi on 13 September, killing two miners and seriously injuring two others. More than 8,000 people of multiple nationalities left the area and requested assistance. On 24 October, another attack against the Chadian defence and security forces was reported in Miski department, near the border with Libya. The spokesperson of the Chadian armed forces announced that the attackers had been neutralized and the situation was under control.

8. The Congo made progress in the implementation of the ceasefire agreement signed on 23 December 2017. In June, 81 supporters of former rebel leader Frédéric Bintsamou, also known as Pastor Ntumi, were released after having been detained since 2016. The judicial authorities lifted the arrest warrant against Pastor Ntumi and two of his allies on 28 July. On 21 August, Pastor Ntumi joined the weapons collection

operation in the Pool region, which had begun on 7 August. On 31 August, the Government adopted a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. With a total budget of $16.6 million, the programme aims to support 7,500 former rebel combatants as well as displaced populations of the Pool region. On 8 October, the Government reported that 5,665 ex-combatants had been identified and 8,007 weapons had been collected and destroyed.

9. In Equatorial Guinea, the sixth national political dialogue took place from 16 to 23 July with the participation of representatives of the Government and 17 recognized political parties and representatives of civil society and religious groups, as well as the diaspora. International, regional and subregional organizations and diplomatic missions were invited to the dialogue as observers. The opposition group Ciudadanos por la Innovación de Guinea Ecuatorial party was barred from participating in the dialogue, although the President of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, had announced a total amnesty on 4 July. Several political leaders in exile also boycotted the dialogue, and few women from the country were in attendance. The final communiqué outlined agreements between the Government, representatives of political parties and the diaspora. However, two opposition parties, Convergencia para la Democracia Social and Unión de Centro Derecha, did not sign the communiqué in protest against the non-application of the announced total amnesty to political actors and the rejection of calls for a transitional government, among other things.

10. In Gabon, the first round of legislative elections and the single round of local elections were held on 6 October. The second round of legislative elections took place on 27 October. The ruling Parti démocratique gabonais won 98 of 143 seats, thereby securing a majority in the National Assembly. The opposition party, Les démocrates, became the second political force with 11 seats. Nineteen women were elected, compared with 15 in the previous legislature.

11. Gabon continued to experience increasing socioeconomic tensions. On 21 and 28 June, the Council of Ministers adopted several austerity measures, including a reduction of salaries in the public sector by 5 to 15 per cent. That was criticized by trade unions and the opposition. On 2 August, the major trade union confederation, Dynamique unitaire, filed an appeal with the Constitutional Court to invalidate the austerity measures and decided to organize demonstrations in Libreville on 13 and 28 August. Despite both demonstrations being banned by the Government, members of the confederation attempted to demonstrate on 28 August, resulting in the arrest of 29 people.

12. In Rwanda, legislative elections took place on 2 and 3 September. The Rwandese Patriotic Front-Inkotanyi coalition party secured 40 of the 80 seats in Parliament, followed by the Social Democratic Party with 5 seats and the Liberal Party with 4 seats. For the first time, representatives of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda and the Social Party Imberakuri, secured two seats each. The parliamentarians were sworn in on 19 September. Overall, women obtained 61 per cent of the seats. Youth, who were accorded a minimum of two seats by a quota system, gained a total of seven seats. Persons living with disabilities were also given one seat by quota. Of the 80 members of the National Assembly, 53 are directly elected and 27 are indirectly elected by representatives of special interest groups.

13. In Sao Tome and Principe, legislative, local and regional elections took place on 7 October. On 19 October, the Constitutional Court announced the final results of the legislative elections. The ruling party, Acção Democrática Independente, won 25 of 55 seats, while the main opposition party, the Movimento de Libertação de São Tome e Príncipe — Partido Social Democrata, gained 23 seats. The opposition coalition, comprising the Partido da Convergência Democrática, the Movimento

Democrático Força da Mudança and the União para a Democracia e Desenvolvimento, secured five seats, and the Movimento de Cidadãos Independentes de São Tomé e Príncipe won two seats. The overall turnout rate was 80.8 per cent. The Minister for Defence and Internal Affairs issued a communiqué on 21 June informing the public that a plot to assassinate the Prime Minister, Patrice Trovoada, had been uncovered and foiled. Subsequently, two suspects, including a member of the Movimento de Libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe — Partido Social Democrata, were arrested but released shortly thereafter due to lack of evidence. On 4 August, the judicial police arrested five people suspected of an alleged attempt to subvert the Constitution.

14. In the Central African Republic, the peace process under the auspices of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation was ongoing, including the preparations for the direct dialogue between the authorities and the main recognized armed groups.

15. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, progress was made in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement as well as in the preparations for the general elections scheduled for 23 December 2018. On 19 September, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced the final list of candidates for the presidential, legislative and provincial elections, in accordance with the electoral calendar. The security situation remained fragile in eastern parts of the country, notably in the Beni, Lubero and Masisi territories of North Kivu, in Ituri province, and on the high plateaux of Uvira and the Shabunda territory in South Kivu, where armed groups continued to carry out destabilizing activities. The situation also deteriorated in parts of Haut-Uélé province as a result of the cross-border movements of South Sudanese armed elements; however, in Ituri province, intercommunal violence between the Hema and the Walendu continued to recede.

16. In Burundi, in accordance with the new Constitution revised in May, the National Assembly and the Senate approved new members of the Independent National Electoral Commission on 29 August. The opposition boycotted the parliamentary session, denouncing the new configuration of the Commission as overwhelmingly pro-ruling party and deploring the lack of consensus in the selection and confirmation of its members.

Security developments and trends

Boko Haram-Lake Chad basin

17. From June to 15 October, Boko Haram was responsible for 70 security incidents leading to 104 civilian fatalities in Cameroon, and 13 security incidents resulting in 27 civilian fatalities in Chad. In June, there was a resurgence of suicide attacks perpetrated by the group in the Far North region of Cameroon. On 16 June, a double suicide attack carried out by young girls resulted in the death of a child in Limani, Cameroon. On 20 June and 4 October, double suicide attacks took place in Kolofata in the Mayo-Sava department near the Cameroon-Nigeria border that killed six and seven civilians, respectively. They were the first suicide attacks in the Far North region since March. Other major incidents included the abduction of four children from Baljoel, near the Cameroon-Nigeria border, as well as the incursion into Talkomari, in the Mayo-Moskota arrondissement of the Mayo-Tsanaga department, where Boko Haram beheaded five people and seriously injured several villagers. In response to the increased attacks, the Cameroonian authorities imposed systematic checks on administrative and security vehicles across the country. There were reports on the arrests, detention and expulsion of several Nigerian asylum seekers in Cameroon.

18. In Chad, suspected Boko Haram elements committed multiple violent attacks against villages and islands in May and July, made easier by the low water level in Lake Chad during the dry season. On 19 July, 18 individuals, including women and children, were killed and 10 women were abducted in Mairon village. On 29 September, 4 civilians and 2 soldiers were reportedly killed in an attack attributed to Boko Haram in Moussarom and Ngueleya in the Lac region, while the Chadian army reportedly killed 17 assailants in a counter-offensive. On 4 October, suspected Boko Haram militants launched mortars into a Chadian army base in Litri, 4 kilometres from the border with Nigeria in the Lac region, killing one soldier and injuring another. On 10 October, it was reported that 8 Chadian soldiers were killed and 11 wounded in another attack on the army in Kaiga Kindji. The Chadian army reportedly killed 48 Boko Haram elements.

19. At a ministerial conference of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, held in Abuja on 30 August, member States validated the regional strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad basin.

Lord's Resistance Army

20. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continued to pose a regional security threat, notably through the abduction of youths for recruitment. From mid-June to September, in the Central African Republic, 17 attacks and 50 abductions targeting villages and mining sites were recorded in the Haute-Kotto and Haut-Mbomou prefectures, an increase over the last reporting period. From June to September, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20 attacks and 23 abductions were recorded near Garamba National Park and in the areas of Banda and Mugalie in the Uélé regions. The attacks resulted in the death of two police officers and one park ranger, and another police officer was injured.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

21. From June to September, a total of three attacks were recorded in the Gulf of Guinea, without any casualties. A tanker with 17 Georgian and 2 Russian sailors was reported missing on 14 August in the Gulf of Guinea. The tanker was found off the coast of the Congo 10 days later.

Poaching and illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources

22. There were continued reports of poaching activities in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where LRA and other criminal groups from South Sudan operate. However, the number of poached elephants declined because of reinforced anti-poaching measures. Two cases of elephant poaching were reported in Garamba in the first half of 2018, compared with 45 during the first six months of 2017. In June, Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo announced its closure to tourists until 2019, after 12 rangers were killed and 2 tourists were abducted in less than a year.

23. In August, Cameroonian authorities arrested six suspected traffickers carrying 700 kilograms of live pangolins and pangolin scales at the airport in Douala. The suspected traffickers indicated that the animals were destined for Asian countries.

24. In August, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) deployed a programme coordinator to Libreville to open a subregional office for Central Africa and coordinate the implementation of a four-year project aimed at strengthening national and regional capacities to combat wildlife crime and illicit trafficking in natural resources.

Effects of climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters on the stability of Central Africa

25. Several countries in the region faced humanitarian crises and intensified conflicts, including transhumance-related clashes, the causes of which could also be linked to climate change. In fact, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were listed as the most vulnerable countries in the world in the Climate Change Vulnerability Index 2017.

26. In Chad, the impact of climate change over the past two decades, including land degradation and diminishing water resources, has resulted in chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. The lean season, which usually occurs from June to August, began prematurely in some regions of Chad, depleting food stocks and causing early transhumance. In northern Cameroon, droughts and recurrent floods caused serious land degradation and loss of livelihood, leaving some 2.6 million people in need of food assistance.

B. Humanitarian developments

27. Persistent violent conflicts in some parts of the subregion triggered population displacements, aggravated food insecurity, epidemics and sexual and gender-based violence and hindered access to basic services.

28. In Cameroon, more than 400,000 persons have been internally displaced and over 26,000 have crossed the border into Nigeria as a result of the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions. On 20 June, the Prime Minister of Cameroon, Philémon Yang, announced a Government-led emergency humanitarian assistance plan of 12.7 billion CFA francs (approximately $22.3 million) for the affected regions.

29. In the Central African Republic, continued violence increased the number of refugees to more than 572,000 as at 1 October, while approximately 616,000 remained internally displaced. So far in 2018, 7 humanitarian workers have been killed and 18 have been injured by hostile action, while 294 security incidents against humanitarian actors or organizations have been reported.

30. The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained worrisome, with 13.1 million people in need of protection and humanitarian assistance, 7.7 million facing food insecurity and 4.5 million internally displaced, 2.4 million of whom were displaced in 2018 alone. Some areas witnessed a significant increase in return movements, notably in the greater Kasai region and Tanganyika. The country hosted more than 536,000 refugees from neighbouring countries while more than 800,000 Congolese sought refuge in the Great Lakes region. Since October 2018, more than 350,000 Congolese nationals were expelled from Angola and arrived in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, mainly in Kasai province. Local populations, as well as those that have been displaced from the Kasai region since August 2016, require urgent assistance including food, household items and shelter, nutrition, health, protection and water and sanitation. The food security situation deteriorated significantly in 2018, affecting 2 million children under the age of 5 who were suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Although in decline since 2017, the cholera epidemic continued to spread. Measles and epidemic malaria currently affect numerous provinces. On 1 August, the Government declared a new outbreak of the Ebola virus disease in North Kivu province, only one week after the first epidemic was declared contained in the western Equateur province. As at 26 November, more than 35,000 people had been vaccinated against the virus; as of the time of writing, 236 casualties (out of 412 cases) have been reported. The increase in the frequency

of attacks by armed groups in the vicinity of Beni continued to hamper response activities.

Boko Haram/Lake Chad basin

31. As of August, some 2.4 million people remained displaced by the nine-year Boko Haram crisis in the Lake Chad basin, including some 97,000 Nigerians who fled to Cameroon and another 10,000 Nigerians who fled to Chad. The crisis has led to significant internal displacement in both Cameroon and Chad, resulting in a major need for assistance with regard to food, nutrition, health and protection, as well as livelihood support. On 4 September, during the High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region, co-hosted by Germany, Nigeria, Norway and the United Nations, donors pledged $2.17 billion to support humanitarian, peacebuilding and development activities in the region by addressing immediate and long-term needs and building the resilience of the affected population. In addition, the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and the World Bank announced $467 million in concessional loans.

C. Human rights trends

32. In Cameroon, there were continued reports of killings, kidnappings and plundering attributed to Boko Haram in the Far North region. In the English-speaking regions, fighting between security forces and armed elements continued to cause casualties, and has paralysed a significant portion of economic activity. Civilians, including children, in those regions were victims of extrajudicial killings, killings, abductions, restrictions of movement and access to health and education, as armed confrontations continued. A significant number of internally displaced persons were reportedly seeking refuge in the forests, and had no access to basic services. Human rights organizations and humanitarian actors continued to face restrictions to access in the regions and thus were unable to effectively monitor the situation. Meanwhile, following video footage circulated through social media of the extrajudicial execution of two women and two children by members of the security forces, the authorities arrested the alleged perpetrators and referred them to a military tribunal. The trial of 47 Cameroonians extradited from Nigeria and detained in late January has yet to begin. Civil society and international organizations have denounced the detention of political prisoners and the ill-treatment and torture of detainees. During the period in the run-up to and following the presidential election, cases of restrictions of the freedom of assembly were reported.

33. In the Congo, on the night of 22 to 23 July, 13 youths between the ages of 16 and 28 were found dead while in custody at the Chacona police station in Brazzaville. The information was first reported by a non-governmental organization, the Observatoire congolais des droits de l'homme, and later confirmed by the Minister for Interior. An administrative inquiry into the incident concluded that the young men were assaulted before succumbing to death. Local non-governmental organizations continued to call for an independent, impartial and international investigation. The organizations also denounced the impunity of high-ranking officials involved in the incident.

34. In Equatorial Guinea, allegations of political persecutions, arbitrary arrests and the mistreatment of prisoners continued, notwithstanding the outcome of the sixth national dialogue and the announced amnesty measures. In July, a member of the opposition party Ciudadanos por la Innovación de Guinea Ecuatorial died in the Evinayong prison centre. A magistrate was also found dead in the central police commissariat in Malabo, and several judges in the country were arbitrarily arrested. In August, the President appointed Fermin Nguema Esono, a former political

opponent, as the new President of the Constitutional Court. On 11 October, the President of Equatorial Guinea pardoned 81 prisoners, resulting in the release of 34 members of the Ciudadanos por la Innovación party on 22 October.

35. In Burundi, the Human Rights Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry on Burundi issued a report on 12 September warning that crimes against humanity and other serious violations, including extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detentions continued unabated through 2017 and 2018. Hundreds of people took part in Government-sponsored demonstrations against the report on 15 September. In recent months, several unidentified bodies have been recovered from lands, rivers and lakes, some of them displaying signs of violence. According to reports from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the police did not carry out investigations into most cases, claiming that the perpetrators were unidentifiable. Owing to the lack of an official inquiry and the absence of credible and independent human rights monitoring bodies, it remains difficult to confirm events leading to the deaths. The Government of Burundi continued to impose restrictions on freedom of association and expression, especially for members of the opposition or individuals perceived as opponents to the Government. On 13 August, Nestor Nibitanga, a human rights defender and former head of a non-governmental organization, was sentenced to five years in prison in Gitega city for undermining State security and inciting rebellion.

36. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, persisting restrictions on civil and political rights and democratic space remained a concern. Activities of armed groups and militias continued to affect the lives of civilians. Such activities, along with continued inter-ethnic violence, led to large-scale displacements, which notably affected women and children. Conflict-related sexual violence continued to be perpetrated by armed groups and militias, the Congolese armed forces and, to a lesser extent, the national police.

37. In Gabon, little progress was made with regard to the situation of detainees, such as political opposition figures who continued to spend months in prison following various incidents including post-electoral violence. The dates of their trials have yet to be announced.

38. In Chad, concerns persisted with regard to freedom of expression, association and opinion. The Government was accused of systematically repressing protesters in N'Djamena, using live ammunition to disperse them. The Government continued to restrict access to social media. Gender inequality and violence against women and girls remained a concern. The persistent strikes by public service providers continued to constrain the population's access to basic public services, including in the health, education and justice sectors. The new Constitution adopted on 4 May mandated the establishment of a national human rights commission; however, the national process to establish the commission was not in conformity with the Paris Principles.

39. In Rwanda, following a presidential pardon, 2,140 prisoners were released on parole on 15 September. In addition, on 5 October, the High Court of Rwanda granted bail to Diane Rwigara, a former presidential candidate in the 2017 election, who was arrested on charges of forgery and incitement of insurrection, and her mother. The bail was granted under the condition that they would surrender their travel documents and not leave Kigali, pending the result of the trial scheduled for 6 December.

D. Socioeconomic trends

40. Continued tensions and strike actions, partly in response to austerity measures adopted by some member States of ECCAS, dominated the general socioeconomic

environment in the subregion. The situation was also exacerbated by the persisting insecurity and violent conflicts in several countries.

41. In N'Djamena, on 25 July, the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of Central African States held its second ordinary meeting to discuss the economic and monetary situation in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). Both economic activities and the external position of CEMAC countries were forecasted to improve, especially with real growth rate in gross domestic product estimated at 2.5 per cent, compared with zero growth in 2017. The projections were based on an upward revision of oil production, mainly in the Congo and Chad, reduced public spending and the ongoing implementation of the CEMAC programme of economic and financial reforms. However, challenges remained in most countries in the subregion with regard to the slow resumption of non-oil activities and the countries' increased reliance on external resources linked to programmes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

42. On 22 August, the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, in his capacity as Chair of ECCAS, met with the President of Equatorial Guinea in Malabo. Both leaders agreed on the need to convene an extraordinary summit of CEMAC Heads of State and Government to discuss the ongoing economic crisis in the subregion. On 25 October, the extraordinary summit took place in N'Djamena. In a final communiqué, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the urgency of implementing the economic programmes of IMF. They also urged member States to accelerate subregional integration and common sectoral policy reforms, and to improve governance.

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

Cameroon

43. From 17 to 22 November, my Special Representative for Central Africa travelled to Yaoundé. He held consultations with the Prime Minister, the Minister for External Relations, the Minister for Decentralization and Local Development, the President of the electoral management body, religious leaders and members of the diplomatic corps. The discussions focused on past and upcoming elections and efforts to assist the Government in addressing the crisis in the English-speaking regions. From 4 to 9 August, my Special Representative for Central Africa travelled to Yaoundé and held consultations with national authorities, including the Prime Minister. The discussions focused on the situation in the country, especially the crisis in the English-speaking regions, the related humanitarian situation and preparations for the presidential election. From 29 September to 13 October, UNOCA conducted a working-level mission during the electoral period in support of the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

44. In line with the recommendations of the electoral needs assessment mission conducted in July 2017, a technical adviser deployed to the United Nations country team on 24 April continued to help coordinate United Nations support to the electoral management body and other entities involved in the electoral process.

Central African Republic

45. My Special Representative for Central Africa actively engaged the regional actors in support of the political process led by the panel of facilitators of the African

Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation. On 27 September, on the margins of the high-level segment of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly in New York, my Special Representative for Central Africa and my Special Representative for the Central African Republic participated in a high-level ministerial meeting on the Central African Republic, which I co-chaired with the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin Archange Touadera, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of ECCAS. The meeting aimed at taking stock of progress with regard to the political process and strengthening international coordinated engagement for the stabilization of the country, as well as support for the African Initiative.

Chad

46. On 5 and 6 July, my Special Representative accompanied the Deputy Secretary-General to Chad on a high-level mission, jointly conducted by the United Nations, the African Union and Sweden, to assess and reaffirm the role of women in peace, security, development and the prevention of violent extremism. The mission met with the President of Chad and Cabinet Ministers, as well as representatives of the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. It also conducted a field visit to Bol in the Lac region.

Equatorial Guinea

47. Prior to the sixth national dialogue, my Special Representative visited Equatorial Guinea from 23 to 27 June to consult with national authorities, including the President, as well as representatives of the political parties and international stakeholders. On 16 July, he attended the opening ceremony of the national dialogue convened by the President. In his statement, my Special Representative welcomed the President's initiative to hold an inclusive dialogue. A working-level team from UNOCA accompanied the Resident Coordinator in Equatorial Guinea to the dialogue, which was held from 16 to 20 July.

48. On 12 October, on my behalf, my Special Representative attended the official ceremony of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the country's independence. During his visit, he held consultations with key national stakeholders, including the President, to discuss outstanding issues following the national dialogue.

Gabon

49. In the context of social tensions resulting from austerity measures taken by the Government, my Special Representative met with the leaders of the main labour unions on 15 August at their request and was informed of their key demands. Following the meeting, my Special Representative addressed a letter to the Prime Minister listing the concerns raised by the labour unions and encouraging the Government to address the issues through dialogue.

50. On 6 September, an international partner coordination group, which included UNOCA, ECCAS, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the delegation of the European Union and the Embassy of the United States of America, met with the electoral management body to discuss the status of preparations and international support for the legislative and local elections. The group issued a joint statement on the eve of the electoral campaign on 24 September, calling for credible, inclusive and peaceful elections. On 22 October, the group met to review the conduct of the first round of legislative elections and the single round of local elections. The group decided to reconvene after the announcement of the final results.

51. From 9 to 12 October, UNOCA, in cooperation with ECCAS and the national police of Gabon, organized a workshop on police and peacebuilding challenges and trained 33 police officers, including 11 women.

Congo

52. My Special Representative continued to follow up on the implementation of the ceasefire agreement signed on 23 December 2017. UNOCA provided support to the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office with regard to the implementation of a project funded by the Peacebuilding Fund aimed at contributing to efforts towards sustaining peace in the Pool region. A working-level team undertook a mission to Brazzaville from 15 to 23 September and worked jointly with the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa to organize a series of training sessions for members of the police and gendarmerie on the principles of human rights and public order. The mission also met with key political actors to operationalize the permanent political dialogue framework, the Conseil national du dialogue.

Sao Tome and Principe

53. From 16 to 19 August, my Special Representative undertook a mission to Sao Tome and Principe and held consultations with national stakeholders, including the President, Evaristo do Espirito Santo Carvalho, and the Prime Minister, on the political situation in the country and preparations for the legislative, local and regional elections. From 12 to 14 September, UNOCA facilitated a capacity-building workshop for journalists on reporting related to elections, which was jointly organized with the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). From 29 September to 11 October, UNOCA deployed a working-level team to the country to monitor the electoral process in support of the Resident Coordinator. After the elections, my Special Representative visited the country from 14 to 21 October for consultations with political actors.

B. Support to the United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

54. The forty-sixth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, for which UNOCA serves as the secretariat, took place in Brazzaville from 29 May to 1 June 2018, with the participation of all ECCAS member States. During its closed-door meeting, the Committee stressed the need for confidence-building measures as an essential tool for conflict prevention that would lead to the adoption of a declaration on confidence-building measures.

55. The ECCAS secretariat provided an extensive briefing on the status of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in Central Africa during the forty-sixth meeting of the Committee, including the recent validation of a regional action plan. The Committee urged its member States to increase the representation of women in delegations attending the biannual meetings of the Committee in accordance with the Sao Tome declaration (see A/72/363, annex II). The Committee also recommended: (a) setting up an observatory on gender-based violence; (b) conducting a study on women's role in preventing violent extremism; (c) establishing a steering committee to monitor the implementation of the regional

action plan; (d) increasing the number of women within national defence and security forces and United Nations peacekeeping operations; and (e) supporting the HeForShe campaign in Central Africa.

56. From 15 to 18 October, representatives of the Bureau of the Committee (the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Chad), as well as the representatives of Cameroon and the Central African Republic, conducted a field mission to Sido, in the Moyen-Chari region of Chad, along the border with the Central African Republic. The forty-seventh ministerial meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place in N'Djamena on 7 December 2018.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

57. As a follow-up to the workshop organized by UNOCA and the ECCAS secretariat in Brazzaville in May to validate the regional action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in Central Africa, UNOCA facilitated a briefing for members of the Government of Gabon, civil society and United Nations entities in Gabon in Libreville on 12 July. A steering committee was established to develop a national action plan for the implementation of Council resolution 1325 (2000) in Gabon.

58. In cooperation with UNESCO and ECCAS, and using extrabudgetary funds from the Department of Political Affairs, UNOCA initiated a study on the state of youth organizations in seven States of Central Africa. The study assessed current national legislation and governmental initiatives as well as opportunities to involve more youth in early warning systems and the fight against violent extremism.

59. On 18 July, my Special Representative attended the sixteenth regional meeting of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the European Union Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Yaoundé. Participants discussed regional integration and cooperation, peace and security challenges and natural resources while welcoming ongoing efforts to unify ECCAS and CEMAC.

60. UNOCA and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) assisted ECCAS and ECOWAS in convening their joint summit mentioned in paragraph 3 above. In a statement issued on 2 August, I commended the Central and West African subregions on the successful summit and reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to support the implementation of the adopted decisions.

61. With the support of UNOCA, the ECCAS secretariat organized a workshop in Libreville from 30 October to 2 November to enhance the operational capacity of the early warning mechanism for Central Africa. The workshop led to the roll-out of the Africa Reporter software application.

62. In Libreville, from 7 to 9 November, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, my Special Representative and the ECCAS Secretary-General participated in an expert group meeting on strengthening subregional conflict prevention capabilities in Africa. The meeting resulted in the validation of an assessment undertaken by the Office of the Special Adviser from May to August 2018 to map the existing institutional capacities and gaps of regional economic communities with regard to conflict prevention.

Boko Haram

63. In N'Djamena on 28 and 29 June, UNOCA participated in a technical workshop on the regional stabilization strategy to examine security, humanitarian, socioeconomic, gender and education issues mentioned in paragraph 19 above.

UNOCA continued to support the Lake Chad Basin Commission in the elaboration of its resource mobilization plan for the implementation of the strategy.

64. From 17 to 19 July, UNOCA participated in a regional meeting on the screening and prosecution of persons associated with Boko Haram in N'Djamena. The event was organized by UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, in close consultation with the African Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). During the meeting, the countries affected by Boko Haram developed coherent approaches on screening and adopted an action checklist to guide the screening efforts.

65. Cameroon is one of the beneficiaries of a project co-implemented by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and OHCHR to train law enforcement officials on human rights, the rule of law and the prevention of terrorism.

66. On 3 and 4 September, my Special Representative participated in the High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region mentioned in paragraph 31 above.

Regional integration

67. On 12 September, UNOCA attended a regional workshop in Libreville on the regional integration strategy paper for Central Africa for 2018–2025 developed by the African Development Bank. The workshop also reviewed a study on sustainable forestry industrialization in the Congo basin countries carried out by the Bank. More than 50 participants, including from CEMAC and ECCAS, recommended the acceleration of the regional integration process in Central Africa and the finalization of the regional integration strategy paper.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

68. The Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security of the Gulf of Guinea in Yaoundé continued to assess the legal frameworks related to the operationalization of the Centre and developed a training syllabus to enhance maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Initiated in April with the support of various partners including UNODC, the activities were expected to end in December.

Regional strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

69. On 6 and 7 September, my Special Representative hosted a meeting in Libreville with the Secretary-General of ECCAS and the Director of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa to discuss the joint implementation of the project entitled "Supporting African States towards the vision of 'Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020': capacity-building in Central Africa". The project aims at strengthening national capacities to address the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons in accordance with the Kinshasa Convention. In a joint letter dated 25 September, my Special Representative and the Secretary-General of ECCAS encouraged the four remaining signatories that had not yet ratified the Kinshasa Convention, namely Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Rwanda, to do so.

Coordination of the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the Lord's Resistance Army

70. At the 795th meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council on 20 September, the United Nations encouraged the Peace and Security Council to review the scope of the African Union Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army, in accordance with the conclusions of the

sixth meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism held on 29 and 30 March 2017 in Addis Ababa. Emphasis was placed on the need for regional and international support for the African Union Regional Task Force, especially in the context of the security vacuum exploited by LRA and other armed groups to intensify criminal activities following the withdrawal of the Uganda People's Defence Forces and the United States Special Forces in June 2017. The African Union Peace and Security Council decided to maintain the Regional Cooperation Initiative, pending the development of a strategy to progressively phase out the Initiative without leaving any security vacuum that LRA could exploit to renew and intensify its destabilization activities in the affected areas. In that regard, the Peace and Security Council requested that the African Union Commission develop an exit strategy for the liquidation of the Initiative that includes realistic timelines and the development of concrete alternatives to the Initiative.

Transhumance and farmer-herder conflicts

71. UNOCA supported subregional initiatives to address growing conflicts between farmers and herders affecting several countries in Central Africa. From 15 to 18 October, the representatives of the Bureau of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa visited Sido, Chad, to assess the security and humanitarian situation in the border area between Chad and the Central African Republic. Following the visit, they formulated recommendations and an action plan to address the issues related to transhumance, including supporting sustained peace in the Central African Republic, the Sudan and the Lake Chad basin, where security issues are linked to transhumance; advocating for the adoption and implementation of transhumance regulations; reinforcing conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms at both the national and regional levels; strengthening the role and participation of women and youth as peacebuilders in both farmer and herder communities; and analysing the relevance of a disarmament programme focused on pastoralists and farmers in the subregion. A new $3 million cross-border project, funded by the Peacebuilding Fund, was approved for implementation by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and IOM. The project is aimed at strengthening dialogue and peacebuilding at the community level for the prevention and management of conflicts between agropastoral communities along the Chad-Central African Republic border, including through strengthening institutional and political dialogue on transhumance dynamics between the two countries.

Link between illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources and financing of armed groups in the subregion, including the Lord's Resistance Army and Boko Haram

72. Allegations of illicit trafficking and the financing of armed groups continued. UNOCA participated in technical meetings with ECCAS and UNODC and exchanged views regarding the implementation of a four-year project funded by the European Union aimed at combating illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources in the subregion. The project also seeks to increase national capacities and address corruption and money-laundering issues.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

73. My Special Representative for Central Africa and my Special Envoy for Burundi, along with representatives of the Department of Political Affairs, attended a meeting in Nairobi organized by my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region on

29 June. They discussed joint efforts by the United Nations to support the East African Community-led dialogue process in Burundi, in cooperation with the African Union.

74. On 2 July, my Special Representative attended the fifth coordination meeting of the United Nations senior leadership in the Great Lakes region, in Nairobi. Participants reviewed the political and security situations in the region and discussed issues related to coordination within the United Nations.

75. In Libreville on 5 and 6 November, UNOCA organized the first working-level coordination meeting among United Nations entities in Central Africa with the participation of political affairs units, peace and development advisers and experts of other United Nations entities and regional economic communities. The meeting was convened to discuss regional challenges. Its conclusions should, among other things, feed into the preparations for the next meeting of heads of United Nations presences in Central Africa, to be held in 2019.

IV. Observations and recommendations

76. As highlighted in the present report, electoral processes were at the heart of political activity in a number of Central African countries. I encourage the continued efforts of all stakeholders to ensure inclusive and credible electoral processes in their respective countries. It is an important step towards sustaining peace and consolidating stability in the subregion, which has on many occasions witnessed tensions and violence related to contested electoral processes in the past.

77. I am pleased to note that elections took place without major incident in several countries of the subregion. In particular, I congratulate all political stakeholders in Sao Tome and Principe for resolving their differences through dialogue. I also invite all countries in the subregion to arrive at a consensus on contentious issues and build confidence in electoral processes. UNOCA will continue to support such efforts for timely, inclusive, credible and peaceful electoral processes.

78. I welcome the political dialogue processes, with a view to finding lasting solutions to conflicts, that are ongoing in several countries of Central Africa. However, in many countries the situation remains volatile. I encourage ECCAS member States to continue reaching out to all stakeholders to resolve differences peacefully, through inclusive dialogue, in order to build consensus to overcome common challenges. I also appeal to all parties to uphold international human rights and humanitarian obligations and fulfil their commitments. I reiterate the full availability of my Special Representative to continue to work with countries in the subregion towards consolidating stability and preventing further conflict.

79. The regional dimension of the conflict in the Central African Republic and the importance of the subregion in the stabilization of that country should be highlighted once again. In that context, it is important that all regional States continue to play a constructive role and provide coordinated support to the authorities of the Central African Republic and its political process. Engagement will be crucial in the long run, and will last well beyond mediation efforts. The long-term engagement of the subregion in the Central African Republic will lead to greater stability throughout Central Africa.

80. Likewise, it is crucial that all international partners of the Central African Republic continue to remain committed to the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation as the principal framework for the political process in the country. The Initiative continues to enjoy the full support of the United Nations, and my Special Representative for Central Africa will continue to play his subregional role, in

cooperation with my Special Representative for the Central African Republic, in garnering support for the Initiative.

81. I remain deeply concerned by the deteriorating security situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, which has led to displacement, abductions and civilian deaths, as well as casualties among the defence forces and security services. Since it began in November 2016, the crisis has deteriorated and violent episodes have become more frequent. I am also concerned by the deteriorating human rights situation in the two regions. The conduct of legislative and local elections in 2019 in those regions may be a challenge, and the United Nations stands ready to provide support to the Cameroonian authorities as they endeavour to ensure an inclusive and peaceful electoral process through dialogue. I call upon all national stakeholders to work together and to refrain from acts that may aggravate the situation. Solutions to any disputes should be sought through inclusive dialogue.

82. I note with satisfaction the holding of the joint summit of the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS and ECCAS on peace, security, stability and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in July. The summit illustrates the genuine commitment of the two subregional bodies to working together in the face of common threats to peace and security. The United Nations will continue to work closely with ECCAS and ECOWAS to contribute to the effective implementation of the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism. I equally encourage other partners to lend support in that regard.

83. I deplore the acts of terrorism and violent extremism which have aggravated the humanitarian crisis in Central Africa and continue to hamper socioeconomic development in the subregion. It is our collective responsibility to redouble our efforts to counter those threats and address their root causes. In that regard, I welcome the recent validation of the African Union and Lake Chad Basin Commission regional strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the areas of the Lake Chad basin affected by Boko Haram activities, as well as the international assistance pledged by partners in Berlin on 3 and 4 September. I encourage partners to speedily disburse their pledges in view of the urgency of the situation. The United Nations, through my Special Representatives for Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel, will continue to lend its support to those efforts. I also call on the Multinational Joint Task Force and troop-contributing countries to ensure that all counter-terrorism operations are conducted in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

84. I remain concerned by the persistent atrocities committed by LRA in the subregion, and the group's negative impact on the civilian population, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. The group's activities related to poaching and illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources, if unaddressed, may inflict irreversible damage to the ecosystem and impede the development of the affected countries. In the long term, the activities have the potential to exacerbate conflict. I therefore welcome the decision of the African Union Peace and Security Council to maintain the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army and call upon the African Union as well as international partners to provide renewed support to the mechanism.

85. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the subregion remains one of the main catalysts of the ongoing conflicts, as various armed groups and transnational criminal organizations continue to profit from their trafficking. The recent meeting of State parties to the Kinshasa Convention as well as the decision to establish a secretariat and a trust fund for the implementation of the Convention are important steps towards curbing that plague. It is important for countries that have

yet to ratify the Convention to do so at the earliest opportunity to boost its implementation and facilitate resource mobilization.

86. The past months have witnessed a rise in transhumance-related conflicts in the subregion, aggravated by the impact of climate change. I commend the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa for the field visit to Chad regarding that issue. I invite all concerned to continue working together to address the challenges related to transhumance, including through strengthening border management and regulating cross-border activities. UNOCA will continue to provide its full support to ECCAS and its member States, including within the framework of the implementation of the Lomé Declaration and in close cooperation with UNOWAS.

87. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the region, ECCAS, CEMAC, the African Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other regional and subregional institutions for their continued collaboration with UNOCA. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Multinational Joint Task Force and troop-contributing countries for their dedication and commitment to the service of peace and stability. I am grateful to the Government and people of Gabon for their generous hospitality and support to UNOCA. I would like to thank the various entities of the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other entities, for their support to and cooperation with UNOCA.

88. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, François Louncény Fall, and the staff of UNOCA for their continuing support to regional efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.